


Book Review

Planning History

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Planning History
The Routledge Handbook of Planning History
Carola Hein, Editor
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This collection of essays on planning history, edited by Carola Hein, is an important and innovative addition to the field of planning studies. The book offers new perspectives and well informed discussions on what is planning history, on why we need planning history, and on how to write planning history. Through this questioning, the handbook contributes to the de-construction of concepts and perspectives long held unquestionable, pointing towards new research agendas, with new topics and dimensions, in this field. As the editor argues, planning is a complex discipline, with multiple meanings and with a non uniform terminology, among those that practice it, across time and from place to place, a pattern that becomes even more so if other languages, besides English, are also considered. This diversity is also a watermark in the methodologies and tools planners use and have used over the years. Confronted with this diversity, the Handbook takes planning as the discipline that emerged in England, in the rest of Europe and in the US, in the late 19th century. Even so, the object of study shifted continuously over time and this is well reflected in the narratives offered in each of the chapters that make up this volume. The book despite not being profusely illustrated includes some figures that are not commonly seen in books on planning history.

The volume is structured into four main parts, besides the Introduction, and comprises in total 38 chapters. Part I ('Writing Planning History: Agents, Theories, Methods, and Typologies') comprises 7 chapters, exploring the way planning history has been written, the pioneers in planning history, the diffusion of planning, the history of planning methodology, the biographical method, interdisciplinary planning history, and aspects of colonial and postcolonial systems in planning. Part II ('Time, Place, and Culture: From Euro-American to Global') has 14 chapters, in which the book addresses specific planning contexts, such as the English-Speaking world, the Francophone countries, the German traditions in planning, the Latin countries in Europe, the case of Russia and Soviet Union, Latin America, South-East Asia, Arab world, Africa,

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China, and Japan, for instance. Part III ('Sites and Dynamics: Issues, Movements, Themes, and Debates') has 12 chapters that deal with the planning history of specific sectors or issues, such as the urban form, economic development, infrastructures, ports and waterfronts, event spaces, public health, housing, suburbanization, citizen participation, environmental issues, disasters and heritage conservation. Finally, Part IV ('Futures'), the shorter one, comprises 4 chapters that explore and discuss issues related to planning education, the changing nature of authorship in planning, and the nature of the future narratives in planning history. If most of these studies focus on Europe and North America planning history, the handbook contains also chapters focused on regions of the world whose planning history is less known for the common reader in western countries, be it students, researchers or planners. It is the case of the chapters focused on Africa, on the Arab World, on China, Japan, Southeast Asia, Latin America, Soviet Union and Russia, for instance. The book also comprises a few studies focused on language areas, as is the case of chapters on the Francophone countries, on the English-Speaking World, on Latin European countries, or on German traditions.

Besides providing a broad view of planning history, of how the discipline has narrated the past, its key players and institutions, frequently heroic histories, the Handbook opens also discussion on new narratives in planning history, exploring new methodological and theoretical approaches and new planning issues too. The need to acknowledge the specific political, social, economic, and cultural context of planning practice is made clear in the Handbook. The idea that planning history narratives should take into account more explicitly the role of women and the gendered structures in which planning takes place, or the need to go beyond mere empirical descriptions, are some of the points raised in this collection of essays on planning history.

It is certain that a volume such as this, despite its more than five hundred pages, cannot take account of all issues pertaining to the history of planning. Numerous narratives are missing. It could have included more on Africa, since it is such a diverse continent, less studied until now than most of the other regions of the world, a research topic on which a whole new generation of researchers, based in or outside Africa, have abundantly dedicated time and expertise in the last two decades, as well as the Portuguese-Speaking countries, comprising the European metropole but also its former colonies in Africa and Asia (in India, in Macao/China, and in East Timor). Similarly, in the last section ('Futures'), a reference to the current ongoing changes in planning, associated with the widespread use of information and communication technologies and generalized access to the Internet in the last three decades, could also be included.

Carola Hein has edited a collection of essays that connect past, present and future. It will certainly serve as the basis for the teaching of planning history in most planning programmes around the world, challenging some of the assumptions on which current planning history programmes rely. And it will surely play that role for many years to come. For the readers of the International Journal of E-Planning Research and for all those working in the field of urban e-planning, the Routledge Handbook of Planning History offers a well-informed empirical account of a variety of aspects related to the history of the discipline. The theoretical as well as the methodological issues raised in some of the discussions found in these chapters are valuable inputs for anyone reflecting on what is Urban e-Planning, why we need it, and on how to write the history of Urban e-Planning. As the famous quote from George Orwell - "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." - keeps remembering us, all the time we read it, the past can indeed influence and impact on the future. To have access to accurate accounts and perspectives of the past of Planning is thus essential for the future of Planning. This book, as others before, is an important contribution for that. For all these reasons this is a book that is mandatory reading for students, researchers, scholars, planners and policy makers interested or working in the broad field of Urban e-Planning.

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